



Every beekeeper takes pride in his or her craft, particularly when their hard work can be represented by something created from their own hives. When asked who has the best honey or hive product around, every beekeeper would probably answer “me”. Thus it’s only human nature to establish formal competitions that evaluate the different products beekeepers create, and these competitions are based on objective guidelines that determine what makes one creation more appealing than another. Below are the criteria used to judge honey and other hive products at the North Carolina State Fair, as well as some helpful pointers to assist beekeepers hoping to win that blue ribbon.

I. Extracted honey

Extracted honey is the most basic of hive products, and therefore the category has the largest entry in most competitions. It can also be one of the more difficult categories in which to perform well, so understanding the judge’s criteria is very important to achieve a high score. There are light, amber, and dark categories of extracted honey.

A. Density (20 points)

The moisture content of honey is typically measured with a special instrument called a refractometer. If the moisture content of the extracted honey is above 18.6%, the entry is *automatically disqualified* because it may permit microbial growth and ferment. Water content below 15.5%, while not disqualified, may be docked points by the judge’s discretion.

B. Absence of crystals (10 points)

The honey should be free of crystallization. These particles can best be viewed with a bright flashlight or polariscope (a special polarized light source that highlights particulate matter in honey).

C. Cleanliness (30 points)

There should be an absence of lint (7 points), dirt (10 points), wax (7 points), and foam (6 points) in the honey. While these particles can

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never be removed completely, they can be greatly reduced using proper straining and settling techniques.

D. Flavor (20 points)

Points will be reduced for honey flavor that has been adversely affected by processing, storage, or heating. This does *not* include subjective differences in taste depending on the floral source of the honey.

E. Accuracy of filling and uniformity (10 points)

Sets of three jars are required for each entry. Each vessel must be filled to just below the top rim and should be consistent among all three jars. Also, there should be an absence of air bubbles in the honey or foam on the surface.

F. Container appearance (10 points)

All of the containers, including lids, must be free of defects, scratches, and smudges. The inside of the lids must also be clean and have no honey residue. Glass or plastic jars are acceptable.

II. Cut comb honey

Honey can be very aesthetically pleasing in wax cells, thus beekeepers have often concentrated on creating pieces of honey cut directly from the comb. There are light and dark honey categories for cut comb, with three sections per entry.

A. Uniformity of appearance (25 points)

Since all entries require three containers of cut comb, points are deducted if the honey combs vary significantly from each other.

B. Neatness (30 points)

All edges should be straight, unbroken, parallel, and sharp. Jagged, uneven combs can be avoided by using a warm, razor-sharp knife to cut the sections.

C. Uniformity of color (15 points)

Care should be taken to select only those sections that contain the same type of honey. Points are deducted if there is variation in color within and among the combs.

D. Absence of watery cappings (10 points)

Some cappings are pure white, while others are darker and appear “watery”. Watery cappings can be caused by bruising or excess jarring.

E. Appearance of comb and freedom of impurities (10 points)

The combs can vary in particulates, wax thickness, and other contaminants.

F. Container appearance (10 points)

All containers must be free of defects, scratches, and smudges.

III. Chunk honey in jars

Another popular category is the combination of extracted honey and cut comb honey. So-called 'chunk' honey can be very appealing if proper care is taken. There are light, amber, and dark categories of chunk honey. Three jars per entry, and each jar must be 14 ounces or greater.

A. Neatness and uniformity of cut (20 points)

Like with cut comb, it is preferable to have parallel, four-sided cuts with no ragged edges.

B. Absence of watery cappings, uncapped cells and pollen (20 points)

Cappings should be pure white and not appear wet.

C. Cleanliness (20 points)

Points will be deducted for stains, foreign matter, wax flakes, foam, and crystallization.

D. Uniformity of appearance (20 points)

All jars in the entry should be uniform within and among jars for their capping, structure, color, and thickness of chunks.

E. Density and flavor of liquid portion (20 points)

Water content above 18.6% will be *disqualified*, below 15.5% will be docked points. Moreover, points will be reduced for honey flavor that has been adversely affected by processing.

IV. Creamed honey

Another popular form of honey is creamed honey, made by solidifying liquid honey with small seed crystals. Three jars per entry, and each jar must be 14 ounces or greater.

A. Fineness of crystals (30 points)

The texture of the honey should be smooth and not grainy, with the sugar crystals melting quickly on the tongue.

B. Uniformity and firmness (25 points)

The surface of the honey should not be soft to the touch or differentially colored.

C. Cleanliness and freedom from foam (30 points)

Particles should not be present in the honey, and the surface and rim should be absent of bubbles.

D. Flavor and color (15 points)

Discoloration and unpleasant aroma will cause points to be deducted.

V. Wax products

While honey is the most popular hive product, there are many other categories available at the state fair. The second most common product is beeswax.

A. Beeswax in bulk

Five pound entries of wax in a block or bowl.

1. Color (20 points): a light color is favorable, ranging from straw to canary yellow
2. Cleanliness (30 points): absence of honey, propolis, and other impurities
3. Uniformity in appearance (15 points): there should not be any gradation in color or texture within the entry
4. Absence of cracking and shrinkage (20 points): cracks that form while cooling are some of the more difficult characters of bulk wax to prevent
5. Aroma and texture (5 points): the wax should feel smooth and non-greasy, and it should not have a distasteful or fermenting odor

B. Pure beeswax products

Any wax product made entirely of beeswax would be entered into this category. Popular examples include candles (both dipped and molded) and figurines.

1. Color (20 points): a light color is favorable, ranging from straw to canary yellow
2. Cleanliness (30 points): absence of honey, propolis, and other impurities
3. Uniformity in appearance (15 points): this includes appearance within and among all entries
4. Aroma and texture (5 points): the wax should feel smooth and non-greasy, and it should not have a distasteful or fermenting odor
5. Quality and appearance (30 points): includes attention to detail, lack of bubbles, difficulty of preparation, etc...

C. Novelty items containing beeswax

Any wax product made partially of beeswax would be placed into this category.

1. Cleanliness (20 points): absence of honey, propolis, and other impurities
2. Quality of wax (20 points): light, uniform color, pleasant aroma
3. Design and overall appearance (35 points): attention to detail, lack of bubbles, difficulty of preparation, etc...
4. Originality (25 points)

VI. Non-carbonated honey wine

Mead is made by the controlled fermentation of honey, and is probably the first alcoholic beverage ever created by humans. Similar to other brewing techniques, mead production involves yeasts to convert sugars into CO₂ and alcohol. This category has become increasingly popular in recent years.

A. Dry or sweet mead

This category is honey, water, and yeast. Additional flavoring ingredients are optional, although mead made with fruit or fruit juice is a separate category (see below).

1. Clarity (25 points)
2. Color (5 points)
3. Taste (20 points)
4. Body (10 points)
5. Bouquet (20 points)
6. Bottles (10 points)
7. Bottle closures (10 points)

B. Melomel

Any mead with fruit added is considered a melomel. Because of the drastic differences in taste, color, and structure, it is difficult to compare melomels to pure meads. Thus they have their own category, but the criteria are the same for a pure mead.

VII. Other categories

There are yet other honey bee related categories that are judged at the state fair. These products promote honey bees in various ways. Competition for most of these categories has been light or even absent in past years.

A. Beekeeping coloring book (under 18 competition only)

1. Overall Quality/General Appearance (30 points)
2. Originality (20 points)
3. Educational Value (40 points)
4. Caption accompanying each page/scene (10 points)

B. Collection of 12 nectar-producing plants

1. Educational Value (preference given to plants of regional importance) (40 points)
2. Quality: overall attractiveness (30 points)
3. Showmanship: originality, choice of colors and arrangement (30 points)

C. Observation hive

1. Overall attractiveness of hive (30 points)
2. Brood: pattern and presence of most developmental stages (20 points)
3. Queen: general appearance (queen must be marked) (30 points)
4. Comb quality: absence of excess drone cells, no unfilled corners, etc. (no more than 3 frames) (20 points)
5. Number of bees in hive: enough bees to cover and care for brood without overcrowding (20 points)

D. Photography

1. Photographic quality (30 points)
2. Mounting (all photographs must be mounted) (10 points)
3. Contents of photograph (must be beekeeping related) (30 points)
4. Caption describing photograph (30 points)

E. Gift package of bee products

1. General appearance (30 points)
2. Originality (30 points)
3. Quality of components (20 points)
4. Availability of components (10 points)
5. Manageability (ability to transport) (10 points)

Conclusions

Placing an entry into the State Fair or local competition is highly rewarding, even if you do not win the blue ribbon. Understanding the rules and judging criteria will increase your enjoyment of a honey competition, and hopefully increase your chances of success. You should also consult the State Fair Handbook for details and regulations of the honey competition, since entries that do not conform to the rulebook are disqualified. Rule books are available from the State Fair Office on Blue Ridge Road, Raleigh NC.